

Raising Heritage Turkeys

Where do I get them?

Turkey poults can be found at the feed store or shipped to your post office from a hatchery or breeder. If you want show quality birds, avoid hatcheries and feed stores and find a breeder. You can buy poults or adult birds and get them shipped.

What do I feed them?

Young turkey poults will need to be fed a starter feed with extra high protein content (28-30%) for the first few months (can be switched to a grower, but many feed stores don't carry grower). You can let them go outside within about 6-8 weeks depending on the weather (lock them up at night). Adult birds should be fed a flock maintenance feed or layer feed if they are laying. Adults will eat less feed if allowed to free-range or pasture. Generally, birds will spill less pelleted feed than crumbles, so switch to pellets as they grow. Butcher heritage turkeys after 6 months of age, and broad-breasted commercial turkeys after 2 months of age.

What sort of housing do they need?

Turkey poults need to be kept in an area that is dry and draft-free, with a heat lamp holding the pen at around 90 degrees during the first week (reduce around 5 degrees each week). The enclosure should be predator-proof; even rats and weasels can kill young birds. If the pen is not inside a garage or sealed barn room, it should be covered with small 1-inch mesh chicken wire weighted down to keep out predators. Adults need the ability to escape predators at night, but do not need a formal shelter from the elements unless you would like to gather eggs. A fenced area, lean-to, or small shed all work well. Turkeys are extremely tough, and likely to roost on top of whatever shelter you build, even if it is raining.

Contact:

Benjamin Janicki

benjamin.janicki@gmail.com

(360) 420-3355

Please contact me with questions. Heritage turkeys need more breeders.

Porter's Rare Heritage Turkeys is a great place to order poults, and a great website resource to learn more about turkey color genetics and varieties.

www.porterturkeys.com

Kathy Parker in Bremerton, WA has poults available in spring in several varieties.

goldmountainturkeys@gmail.com

Feathered Reptiles Poultry Farm in Tuscon, AZ is another great place for poults.

featheredreptilesfarm.weebly.com

Turkey Varieties

Commercial Turkeys

Modern commercial turkeys were developed beginning in the mid 1950's to be bred for much larger breast sizes and faster growth rates than in the past. Since then they have diverged from traditional turkeys so much that they cannot breed naturally and require artificial insemination. They often develop leg and joint problems due to their extreme growth rates and have less time to put on a layer of fat, which results in less flavor. However, they do their job incredibly well, and are ready to butcher in a third the time of traditional heritage varieties, at only 2 months of age.

For small farms, breeding commercial turkeys can be impractical, since artificial insemination is required, and the older birds develop health problems. If you want these fast-growing commercial turkeys, you will likely need to purchase new poults each spring. You will have to decide for yourself which kind of turkey is best for your farm. For many folks, buying new poults each spring works great. For others, breeding their own turkeys is a tremendously rewarding experience.

Pros:

- Fast Growth Rate
- Large Size
- Efficient Feed Consumption
- More Available – and Cheaper

Cons:

- High Disability Rate
- Short Life Span
- Cannot Breed Naturally
- Few Color Options
- Less Flavorful



Broad Breasted Bronze



Broad Breasted White

Heritage Turkeys

Heritage turkeys are the traditional turkeys that our forefathers bred from the time of the pilgrims to the mid 1900's. They are bigger and heavier than wild turkeys, but without the growth rate problems of commercial turkeys. These are the same turkeys shown in poultry shows. The definition of a heritage turkey is threefold:

- 1) Naturally mating. No artificial insemination required.
- 2) Long, productive lifespan. Can free range outdoors and fly up to roost at night.
- 3) Slow growth rate. Ensures healthy bone and joint development and better flavor.

All heritage turkey varieties today are rare and need more breeders. If you choose to breed one of these rare and historic varieties, you will be doing your part to preserve their genetics for future generations. Consult the American Poultry Association's "*Standard of Perfection*" for breeding guidelines.

Pros:

- Hardy and Healthy
- Good Foragers
- Naturally Breeding
- Long Life Span
- More Flavorful

Cons:

- Slow Growth Rate
- Less Available
- More expensive

Following are the heritage turkey varieties that have been accepted into the APA *Standard of Perfection*. There are many other varieties as well.



White Holland

The original white turkey. Developed for its pure plumage and clean looking carcass with no dark pinfeathers. Not to be confused with the broad-breasted white, this turkey may be the same color, but can breed naturally and has a slower growth rate.



Standard Bronze

Same color as a wild turkey, but larger and heavier. The original domesticated heritage turkey. The ancestor of the broad breasted bronze, but still capable of naturally breeding and generally healthier. Heaviest heritage variety.



Narragansett

Silver feathers laced with black. Tail similar to Bronze, but lighter. One of the first varieties developed in America by settlers.



Black

Entirely black, with a greenish sheen. One of the oldest varieties.



Blue Slate

A grey, blue slate color throughout, with a few black splotches here or there.

Do not breed true:

- 50% of offspring will be Blue Slate
- 25% of offspring will be Black
- 25% of offspring will be self-blue (a light, powder blue, often called lavender)

If you breed Black to Blue Slate, you will get 50% of each in the offspring. If you breed Self Blue to Black, 100% of offspring will be Blue Slate.



Bourbon Red

Chestnut red body, with white wings and tail. Developed in the late 1800s.



Royal Palm

White feathers laced in black. Somewhat lighter weight than other varieties.



Beltsville Small White

The smallest heritage turkey variety. White like the White Holland, but a bit over half the size. Similar to Midget White, and almost indistinguishable.